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Mediating a Pauline Poetics: The Imperial, Sacred Georgics of John Dyer and William Cowper

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Mediating a Pauline Poetics: The Imperial, Sacred Georgics of John Dyer and William Cowper

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Abstract

Mediating a Pauline Poetics: The Imperial, Sacred Georgics of John Dyer and William Cowper

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This report offers an analysis of the ways in which two eighteenth century georgic poems, John Dyer's *The Fleece* and William Cowper's *The Task*, mediate evangelical and imperial practices. Through an inquiry into the recent critical intersection between Kevis Goodman's media focused research into the georgic and Clifford Siskin and William Warner's similarly inflected inquiry into the Enlightenment, this report suggests that the didactic, agricultural musings of Dyer and Cowper betray a deep engagement the consequences of imperialism and the execution of Britain's dawning evangelical charge.

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The georgic genre investigates and extols work. Through poetry, it binds prosaic minutia with epic conceits in order to familiarize its readers with the sensations and pleasures of agriculture. As Kevis Goodman shows in her monograph *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*, the modern georgic also demonstrates the folding of history into the land, the encapsulation of the everyday into the instructive soil, and the ways in which "unpleasurable feeling" makes the mediation of history apparent. Like many recent applications of media studies to poetics, Goodman's work provides provocative suggestions, and reinvigorates a series of georgic texts. Perhaps too long linked with drowsy, didactic lessons in Latin class, the georgic takes on a new richness for Goodman as a space in which media can dwell and in which poets can experiment with new representations and mediations of those media. A reader might turn to William Cowper's crowded georgic, *The Task*, as Goodman herself does, and reexamine that poetic storehouse of manufactured objects in a new light, attending to how Cowper translates sofas, timepieces, and newspapers into the georgic mode. The georgic sustains all these objects by providing exhibition spaces within the landscape and allowing Cowper distance enough to approach each in turn and examine its qualities at length. In short, the georgic is a zone ripe for mediation. Such an observation, given the mimetic charge that underscores much poetry, might seem banal. Poems, after all, represent *things* and imbue them with layers of meaning. And, at another critical moment, such an observation might do little more than emphasize one of the many formal possibilities of a genre. However, given Clifford Siskin and William Warner's recent insistence on the

importance of mediation to what we think of as the Enlightenment, we might observe the georgic's fitness for mediation and recognize its discursive action within the eighteenth century's intellectual landscape. Here the limits of the georgic's powers of mediation and their relationship to the Enlightenment's sacred currents betrays a deep engagement with the consequences of imperialism and the execution of Britain's dawning evangelical charge.

The enterprise of understanding how the georgic's seemingly secular powers of mediation are involved with its theological activities is well served by the more inclusive understanding of "enlightenment" that recent work in intellectual history has made available. As Michael Warner makes clear in his essay in Siskin and Warner's edited collection *What is Enlightenment?*, enlightenment texts connect a wide variety of spheres in ways our latter-day common sense obscures when it divorces the sacred from the secular and even imagines those poles as openly combative. Warner writes that, "far from being simply a reaction against an already congealed 'Enlightenment,' eighteenth-century evangelical practices came into being through many of the same media and norms of discourse" (Warner 368). The georgic as a genre has seemed rooted in secular processes—science, industry, meteorology, land stewardship—and Goodman's gloss on the genre, while it expands the scope of the georgic, ultimately reinforces this notion.[1] But, as Warner reminds us, distinctions between secular and religious spheres are anachronistic. Therefore, whereas Goodman examines georgic mediations of history's

[1] Admittedly, Goodman is explicitly not interested in providing a genre survey. For a general survey, see John Chalker's *The English Georgic: a Study in the Development of a Form* (1969).

material footprint, this paper will expand upon Goodman's initiatives by bringing into focus representations of eighteenth century theology within the georgic form. It focuses on two georgic poems in particular: William Cowper's *The Task* (1784) and John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757). This pairing emphasizes the georgic's sprawling scope. While *The Fleece* tends towards the didactic, *The Task* veers toward the prophetic. Yet, despite their differences, both georgics focus on moments of imperial anxiety, and explicitly work through national traumas to eventually articulate a theology dependent on both those specific historical traumas and on the representational qualities and limits of the georgic landscape.

Due to its agricultural focus, it's unsurprising that the character and confines of the georgic's representational space are rooted in the conventions of landscape representation. One should not underestimate landscape as a potential medium. In eighteenth century thought, landscape occupied a prominent position as a dominant art form and as an organizing schema for thought. Lisa Moore describes landscape as a "powerful idiom in eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture" that operates within a complex lineage which encompasses multivalent renaissance pleasure gardens as well as austere statements of imperial power.[2] In an influential essay on "Imperial Landscape" published in his edited collection *Landscape and Power*, W. J. T. Mitchell explores the darker side of what he analyzes as the powerful landscape "medium." Mitchell notes that

[2] From Moore: "In Renaissance ideology the pleasure garden came to signify a complex of ideas: the human ability to subject and tame nature; regal and aristocratic status; a living encyclopedia of God's creation; a setting for alfresco entertainment; and a symbolic vehicle for allusions and allegorical meanings drawn from classical, biblical, and literary sources.

"[l]andscape might be seen more profitably as something like the 'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies…and fractured images" (Mitchell 10). The consequences of landscape's imperial charge resonate within georgic landscape poems, allowing poets like Dyer and Cowper to organize the many sinews of Britain's empire. For both poets, landscape becomes a master medium that breathes the whole range of representation and figures into its body.

If we conceive of the landscape as a wider organ in which these georgics work through their historical moments, articulating theologies, we might place its individual objects at the cellular level of this process. In both of the poems under consideration here, the reader encounters a dizzying variety of material objects within their didactic spaces. Many sections of Cowper's *The Task* are devoted to, and named for, objects such as "The Sofa", "The Timepiece" and "The Garden" that, as Cowper describes them, turn out to themselves be vehicles for mediation. Though Dyer sustains an extended focus on his eponymous subject of "The Fleece," his poem mediates a wide range of auxiliary objects that crowd around that central subject. These minor objects illustrate the fleece's industrial processes as well as its material uses, frequently shifting form as they do so: thus wool, for instance, appears as an uncarded mass, a woven textile, a tapestry, and, last but not least, in the form of flocks whose national differences effectively multiply this already wide range of incarnations. In Goodman's formulation of the georgic, these auxiliary objects are the competing media that the georgic form seeks to organize.

Goodman writes that poetry (in part under the influence of the georgic) "has to define itself not only against an array of prose genres, whose material it often usurps, but also in relation to non-written means of perception and communication, whose several mystiques it often courts" (Goodman 9). For Dyer, domestic textile fibers compete for the stakes of national pride. And, while Dyer is explicit about the stakes and battle-lines of this competition, his woolen-royal-rumble distracts the reader from other conflicts among the various communicative media objects that constantly vie for representative power within his text.

It might seem strange to understand a text as an environment for conflicting media rather than as a combatant in such a conflict. Nevertheless, such an understanding would have been all too familiar to eighteenth century readers of religious writing. Evangelical religion during the eighteenth century was a media battleground, as Michael Warner shows in his *This is Enlightenment* essay "The Preacher's Footing." Rather than explain these battles as conflicts between print and orality organized along now-familiar lines, Warner employs Ervin Goffman's concept of "footing" as a way to position the disposition of specific objects within the media arena. Glossing Goffman, Warner notes that "[a]s people speak they also signal in various ways how they are related to their speech, and this has implications for how we might understand both what they say and who they are" (Warner 371). This positional play was of paramount importance to evangelical traditions as they sought the successful transmission of the Gospel. Unsurprisingly, as Warner notes, "one of the principal subjects of evangelical preaching

was preaching itself" (371). Within these discussions, analyses of technologies and techniques of transmission commanded center stage, and their success was judged in the print marketplace. Warner calls attention to Robert Dodsley's poem *The Art of Preaching, in Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry* (1739), noting that, given "Dodsley's investment in several booksellers and publishers, it is not entirely surprising that his critical project rests on the circulation of vendible printed sermons" (376). This commercial awareness has implications for preaching's print representation. Warner notes that such market consciousness creates "a generalized consideration of the sermon text as extricable from the situation of its preaching for the purposes of comparison with other performances." For Warner, in fact, the procedure of extracting a media object and pulling it from the context of its creation "creates a new object—the sermon" (378). This phenomenon leads Warner to suggest that the extrication and remediation of sermons into the print marketplace alters their "footing" and transforms their ethical and social problematics.

Warner's observation of an altered "footing," which takes into account conflicting media, resonates well with Goodman's understanding of the eighteenth century georgic. This resonance suggests a kind of formal homology between the georgic mode and the religious tracts of Warner's study. Warner's footing emphasizes an awareness of and navigation through competing media which Goodman echoes in the many mediatory "paths" available within the georgic. This homology can be explained through an understanding of each form's claim to the real. Both forms rest their pedagogical charge

on the verisimilitude of their claims. Within the georgic, Goodman writes, that "the power and interest of the real depends on a self-conscious heightening and restatement of the real" (Goodman 26). Such an insistence on the "real" also warrant the organization of other media within both sermon and georgic landscape. In this way, both forms allow for seemingly passive statements of power which take their strength from their positional savvy. In turn, these georgic and theological statements are similar in this way to the imperial landscapes of Mitchell's study as well. Both sermons and georgics work to create imperial "dream works" which attempt to position their own artistic, pedagogic, or theological interventions above a landscape of organized and subdued competition. Of course, this comparison works both ways, and, if these landscapes (georgic or otherwise) are always imperial, they are also, for that, always evangelical.

There are longstanding, intimate connections between imperial and evangelical practices which surface in both Cowper's and Dyer's georgics through their engagement with Saint Paul's evangelical charge. [3] Paul's proximity to this connection has, in recent years, given his texts relevancy in unlikely places within the university, where he has become a flashpoint for contrasting ideas localism and empire-enabling universalism. For critics like Alain Badiou, Paul provides a platform for the construction and assertion of Truth, while Slavoj Žižek's reading insists on the moments of fracture built into Paul's

[3] Of course, this paper cannot engage these ideas fully. The connection might be best (if anachronistically for our purposes) described according to Livingstone's prescription for Civilization, Commerce and Christianity, imperialism and evangelical traditions become nearly indistinguishable in practice. For more information, see William L. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism.*

writing.[4] Clearly Paul is bound up in the issue and whatever the precise orientation of Paul's epistles towards empire and the evangelical mission, the contemporary discussion has succeeded in reasserting their relevancy in understanding the operations of empire. Of course, given the volume of scholarship dealing with Paul, his letters could hardly be considered a "rediscovered" or "found" texts, and, as both Dyer and Cowper demonstrate, his writings were central to the articulation of ideas of evangelical empire in the eighteenth century.

Indeed, Paul even intrudes upon the georgic, and in a cliché as old as the Christian church, Cowper directly conscripts Paul within the action of his poem, ostensibly giving further weight to his investigation into Paul's political theology. As we will see in further detail later, within Cowper's poem Paul provides, not without complications, "unmediated" truth which attempts to subsume the conflicting media in Cowper's georgic. To writers mired in the turbulent media landscape of the eighteenth century, the words and personage of Paul seemed to promise a path leading outside mediation. Even John Locke, despite his abiding interest in the mechanisms of human understanding, expressed anxiety over the limits imposed by mediated communication. As John Guillory writes in his essay "Enlightening Mediation," "[Locke's] desire for the direct transfer of thoughts and feelings, inasmuch as it is counterfactual, is evidence of a recurrent anxiety that troubles the development of communication theory" (46). Though

[4]For a somewhat brief introduction to the debate see Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* and Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*.

repressed in the *Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke brings this uneasiness to the forefront in his later commentary on Paul's epistles.

Locke's posthumously published *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Saint Paul* fits perfectly within Warner's conception of the multifarious, contentious religious print culture of the eighteenth century. In it Locke responds to a perceived dearth of scholarly insight into Paul's epistles and attempts to grapple with the difficulties that Paul's text present to the reader. Though the title of his volume's introduction, "Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles, by consulting St. Paul Himself" seems to suggest that Locke, like Cowper, looked to Paul for a path outside of mediation, both Locke's essay and his larger paraphrase of the epistles are relentlessly realistic in their systematic attempts to get closer to Paul.

Within his introductory essay Locke locates the challenges to understanding in two categories: the first contingent upon the presentation and organization of the biblical text, the second intrinsic to Paul's own writing. Locke notes that by dividing Paul's epistles into chapters and verses "they are so chopped and minced, and, as they are now printed, stand so broken and divided, that not only common people take the verses usually for distinct aphorism; but even men of more advanced knowledge" (Locke 7). Here problems of textual mediation have not only puzzled popular understanding but have also altered the discourse when even those of "advanced knowledge" are apt to misquote and poorly remediate Paul's words. Locke also implicates the printed page. He notes, in particular "When the eye is constantly disturbed in loose sentences, that by their

standing and separation appear as many distinct fragments; the mind will have much ado to take in…an uniform discourse of dependent reasonings" (7). When contenting with something as sacred as Paul's writing, these "loose" sentences undermine understanding. The idealized Paul that Locke describes here seems utterly antithetical to the conventions of print. The process of transmission decomposes Paul's message both on the printed page and again in the reader's "dependant reasoning." The fragmented sensation, which would become so important in romantic poetry, is here anathema to understanding.

Locke's frustrations are suggestive of the abstract similarity between theological tracts and the georgic. In Locke, Paul's writing emerges as space comparable to, and as problematic as, that of a half-realized georgic, with multiple lines of thought and an overflowing plurality of didactic voices. For Locke, this landscape of conflicting insights and sensations seems without order when manifested on the printed page and defies Locke's attempts to reduce Paul's text to its essential truth. Locke notes that we might consider Paul "when he was writing, as beset with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utterance. In this posture of mind it was almost impossible for him to keep that slow pace, and observe minute that order and method of ranging all he said" (5). Here Paul's mind allows a diversity of voices which struggle through the confining requirements of both writing and argumentation. Any understanding, under ideal circumstances, seems to require a "slow pace" and contextualization. In other words, for Locke, Paul seems to lack the proper pastoral footing for the organization and dissemination of his insights. Interestingly, Locke's critique of the presentation of the epistles and the characterization

of their challenges does not lead him to any streamlined arrangement in his paraphrase. Like many other paraphrases, Locke further divides the text, filling his pages with summaries, line-by-line glosses, detailed footnotes, and Paul's original text, as if this further fragmentation could somehow inculcate a truer sense of its real meaning and bring Locke closer to Paul.

In practice, Locke's efforts only make that "diversity of voices" in Paul's writing all the more apparent. Here Locke's baroque approach returns us again to the georgic. Like Locke's paraphrase, the georgic is a scene of proliferation rife with what Goodman reads as a "rivalry with other 'sensible paths,' during a period that both promoted fast change…and suffered anxieties of its own expansions" (Goodman 10). In the following sections this paper will examine its two selected georgics and attempt to place each of them back into the chaos of its creation while indexing its representations of that chaos. Through their juxtaposition a theological dialectic played out in a hundred other media across the eighteenth century emerges within georgic space, and new and troubling ramifications materialize which seem to participate both in a Romantic turn and, perhaps, in the rise of a new evangelical tradition. It is in the transmission of these suggestions that each georgic, in its own way, encounters the same problems Locke faced but without the ability to implement his textual recourse. Here, among Addison's pleasurable "byways" no turn of prosody can rout the roaring din or stop the each poem's feverish spiral into the georgic's ultimately apocalyptic dialectic.

I.

The drum roll announced the admiral's presence on the quarterdeck. He had spent the cool mid-March morning in preparation with a clergyman and two friends who had previously come to join him on the HMS Monarque. As he exited the cabin with them, he stood before two files of marines who formed a path down the deck to a small, square cushion. All hands had been called to attention for the occasion and the ship was crowded with the officer corps of the other vessels in the squadron currently anchored in the harbor of Portsmouth. Other sailorson navy ships and commercial craft in the harbor paused in their daily operation and attempted to get a better view of the Monarque's decks. The admiral walked with composure and initially declined a blindfold. His friends advised him otherwise, urging him to think of the crew's sensibilities. He relented, and, now blindfolded, knelt on the cushion to face a newly formed line of marines. In his hand he held a handkerchief. When he dropped it, the shots rang out. Hume, in his *History of England*, reports that the "volley was so decisive, that five balls passed through his body, and he dropped down dead in an instant. The time in which this tragedy was acted, from his walking out of the cabin to his being deposited in the coffin, did not exceed three minutes." (Hume V.69). [5]

Seventeen fifty-seven had not been a good year for Britain's imperial ambitions. The execution of Admiral John Byng capped nearly a year of scandal in the wake of the

[5]This narrative has been drawn from several sources including S. Eardly-Wilmot's 1895 article in The Pall Mall Magazine, contemporary issues of *The London Chronicle*, and David Hume's *History of England.(*volume 5. 62-71).

Battle of Minorca. After suffering a tactical defeat off of that Mediterranean island, Byng had ceded the British Fort St. Philip to the French fleet while attempting to preserve the integrity of his ships by returning to Gibraltar. The surrender of the fort was seen as a cowardly act, and effigies of the unfortunate admiral were hung across Britain.[6] Eager to save face amidst the ensuing discussion, the Admiralty charged Byng for breaching the Articles of War. However, as the Admiralty investigation continued, public opinion quickly turned, and newspapers across the nation began to fill with cries of mercy for Byng.[7] An effort was even made by the House of Commons to intercede on Byng's behalf and spare him from the court's decision. Meanwhile, on both the level of military action and of public opinion, the Seven Years War had gotten off to a rocky start more generally. In America the English had been forced to surrender Fort William Henry, and the French's Indian allies had slaughtered the survivors of its seige. Such episodes of beleaguerment often get forgotten in the broader context of Britain's global ascension, but for those living at such a time, Britain's emergence as world hegemon seemed anything but inevitable.

John Dyer's georgic *The Fleece* was published just one day after Byng's long-in-coming execution. The publication notices for Dyer's work were printed in the same short, weekly periodicals that described the minutia of Byng's execution, lauding his

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6 A retelling of the event, over a hundred years later noted that "The vexation and rage of the English people against the luckess Admiral Byng found vent in a wholesale hanging and burning of his effigy." (*Chambers Journal Vol. 51)*

7 Cardwell. *Arts and Arms. 84-87*

heroic demeanor while implying the injustice of his fate.[8] An early advertisement for the poem, appearing in *The London Chronicle* on March 3rd, sits just above a notice for Charles Fearne's *The Trial of the Hon. Admiral John Byng*. The notice dwarfs Dyer's scant, five-line advertisement, which reads: "The Fleece, a Poem: in Four Books. By John Dyer, LL. B. Author of the *Ruins of Rome*. &c. Printed for R. and J. Dosley, in Pallmall" (*The London Chronicle* 216*).* Perhaps because of the publishing firm R. and J. Dosley's s proclivity towards evangelical texts, Dyer had sought out Robert Dosley and was delighted to have *The Fleece* accepted. (Williams 134). Dyer had previous worked with Dosley in reprinting both *Grongar Hill* and *The Ruins of Rome* in Dosley's 1748 *Miscellany*. Given their history together, it's especially strange that the advertisement provides such dated identifications for Dyer. Though he had been recently awarded an honorary degree, Dyer had not practiced law since his father's death in 1720, which had brought him both a yearly income and his variegated training in poetry, painting, and leisure. This is not to say Dyer's life was free of burdens after his father's death. In the 1720s and 1730s Dyer tended a variety of parishes in Leicestershire as a curate, before his 1741 ordination as a deacon in the Anglican Church—an assignment that does not receive any mention in the advertisement. Additionally, this position was central to his poem's subject; his parish in the English Midlands put him into direct contact with the process of wool manufacture and provided him with plenty of fodder for his georgic's dense didactic descriptions.

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8 *The London Chronicle* (1757, March 12-15)

Following the format set by Virgil's paradigmatic *Georgics*, Dyer breaks *The Fleece* into four books. He begins with an exploration of the British landscape and its suitability for raising sheep, tracking the process of sheering, spinning, and weaving to arrive, by Book Four, at passages of hyperbolic praise for the mercantile system and for Britain's commercial power. Broadening out from the putatively narrow subject matter of "The Fleece," Dyer engages with the political discussions of his day by attempting to discredit Britain's imperial losses and by looking towards possible gains. Thus, with regard to the American front in the Seven Years War, Dyer disparages the fur trade when he envisages how"The kindly fleece…enfolds with cheerly [sic.] warmth… those, who seek, / Through gulfs and dales of Hudson's winding bay, / The beaver's fur, though oft they seek in vain" (Dyer 4.559-463). Here Dyer characterizes fur as beneath wool both in terms of quality and of commercial viability. Furthermore, he starkly contrasts the American landscape with that of India, whose "pure stream and garden fruits sustain" perhaps reminding the reader of Robert Clive's successes during the 1756-7 campaign against the Nawab Siraj Ud Daulah which had provided Britain with a new commercial frontier (Dyer 2.27).

The Fleece was especially well-reviewed in *The Critical Review* and *The Monthly Review*. In these reviews Dyer's political positioning paid dividends, enthralling critics who cheered his call for naval power and expanded trade. What's more, these reviewers admired Dyer's command of the georgic's formal resources and his ability to use them to remediate topical geopolitical issues. The reviewer in *The Critical Review* noted that

"The subject of his poem is peculiarly interesting to the English reader by being *national,* and conveying to us most pleasing ideas of our own wealth and happiness" (*The Critical Review* III.402). This praise fits nicely in the context of resistance to those who would characterize Britain's war effort as faltering. James Grainger, writing for *The Monthly Review*, emphasized the connections between Dyer's *The Fleece* and Virgil's *Georgics* in ways that likewise highlighted the martial virtues of Dyer's poem.[9] Discussing Dyer's many digressions, Grainger cites Virgil's description of the battle of Philippi and his subsequent image—one of *The Georgics*' most celebrated set-pieces—of the farmer turning up the vestiges of war with his plow. Rather than criticize Dyer for his digressions, Grainger praises them as in the Virgilian tradition of forging such linkages, arguing that "the Didactic Poet must relieve the attention by seasonable Episodes, and natural digressions, which not only spring from the subject, but which, by ingenious management artfully bring back the devious strain." (*Monthly Review*). Grainger appears to be operating under the influence of Addison's appreciation of the tangential pleasures of the georgic, and therefore his positive attitude towards Dyer's digressions could be expected. Still, when Grainger characterizes each of Dyer's digressions as "natural" objects that "spring" up from the poem as if the work were a kind of natural garden, he transposes landscape, the organizing schema of the georgic, upon his critical evaluation.

This georgic mode of imperial landscape writing appears in *The Critical Review* as well. The reviewer there observes that "In this agreeable landscape we perceive that

[9] Grainger would later write a similar georgic called *The Sugar-Cane* (1764). (Note from the Williams Bio of Dyer, 136).

the objects are properly placed, the figures well grouped, and the ordonnance of the piece just and natural" (*The Critical Review* 403). Within the review, individual elements of Dyer's poem are characterized as "objects" which are grouped into various orders. While it is not surprising that both of these contemporary reviews place a special emphasis upon imagining the georgic poem as a landscape, the intensity with which they do so is remarkable. This intensity can be gauged by pausing over *The Critical Review*'s application of the word "ordonnance" to Dyer's work. The OED defines "ordonnance" as a "systematic arrangement, esp. of literary material, architectural parts or features, or the details of any works of art" (OED). The word seems perfectly apposite for Dyer's work, presenting as it does a systematic arrangement of several such media: literary, architectural, and general "art," which are governed, within the text, by the poem's vision of a landscape medium. This same nesting can be seen within the reviews themselves. Each review relies on a panoply of visual media in order to describe Dyer's poem. In one instance, invoking a painterly evaluation, the writer for the *The Critical Review* notes that "the colours are excellent, the strokes masterly, and the whole picture highly finished" (403). Here the reviewer settles into an abstracted, visual evaluation, slipping away from, or perhaps within the governing schema of the landscape.

This multivalent praise, indeterminate in its dominant metaphor, suits both the Dyer's *The Fleece* and the georgic in general. Like his critical reviews, Dyer populates his georgic with a wide range of media. But, rather than the descriptive charge of a critical review, in the georgic, these media both live within the poetic framework and

threaten alternative modes of representation. In one instance, after an earnest description of the processes of creating tapestries, Dyer wanders to the object of the tapestry itself when his poetic speaker enters the halls of the Duke of Marlbrough's palace, Blenheim. Taken by the sight of the tapestries, the speaker muses on this alternative medium: "To mimic nature, and the airy shapes / Of sportive fancy: such as oft appear[…]Now grac'd by Blenheim, in whose stately rooms / Rife glowing tapestries, that lure the eye / With Marlb'rough's wars" (Dyer 3.494-502). Dyer's description begins with rather dull, indistinct observation of the tapestries mimicking "nature" and "airy shapes." But rather than continue with a description of their specific qualities Dyer pauses, contextualizing the media object by reminding the reader of its placement within Blenhiem's "stately rooms." Here a strange inversion occurs; the tapestries become "grac'd" by the house, siphoning their mediatory lure, and locating their appeal in the house which "grac'd" them. Blenhiem, in this instance, acts as a kind of landscape, and Dyer's pause gestures to the landscape's dominate status within the georgic.

However, landscape's status here is also contested. Regardless of Dyer's deferent gesture, his poetic eye strays back to the tapestries again. And though the tapestries, like *The Fleece*, invoke national pride, their patriotic content does not lure Dyer. Instead the tapestries' attractions seem to have less to do with their nationalist display than with the mediating power of the woven image. Returning to their description, Dyer writes, "Of Gaul flung open to the tyrant's throne. / A shade obscures the rest—Ah, then what pow'r / Invidious from the lifted sickle snatch'd / The harvest of the plain? So lively glows /

The fair delusion, that our passions rise / In the beholding, and the glories share / Of visionary battle" (III.512-8). Completely intoxicated with the scenes of war, it takes a moment of interpretive failure, the "shade" that obscures, to snap the speaker out of the scene. This moment demonstrates the phenomenon noted by Goodman, where in the georgic landscape, "historical presentness is often 'turned up' … as *unpleasurable* feeling…the noise of living…rather than shapely, staged, or well-defined emotions" (Goodman 3-4). Here the "*unpleasureable*" experience occurs in the sickening "invidious" judgment which "snatch'd / [t]he harvest" of his imagination and forces a recognition of the "fair delusion" which elicits passion. Of course, in viewing, through Dyer's art, the Blenheim tapestries, we are also looking at a landscape within a landscape, and, as it turns out, Dyer's rendition of what the tapestries represent comes in the same overwrought language as his direct depiction of the landscape of the English countryside.

Something within the tapestries and their mediation of a glorious history is unsettling: perhaps their subversion and redirection of Dyer's high-minded poetic project. As one might expect, Dyer's focus is consistently derailed throughout the poem, but usually it comes to rest on his georgic's theme or the problems of its mediation. This is particularly prevalent in his attempts to bind an adoration of trade with a theology that is contingent upon commercial enterprises and transmitted through a range of earthly media. For instance, while expounding on the benefits of trade in the second book, Dyer expounds on a sermon-like litany of objects that trade provides:

> Trade to the good physician gives his balms;
> Gives cheering cordials to th' afflicted heart;
> Gives, to the wealthy, delicacies high;
> Gives, to the curious, works of nature rare;
> And when the priest displays, in just discourse,
> Him, the all-wise Creator, and declares
> His presence, pow'r, and goodness, confin'd,
> 'Tis Trade, attentive voyagers, who fills
> His lips with argument" (Dyer 2.612-20).

It is rather difficult to locate the precise objects Dyer describes in this instance. At first, it seems that Dyer is focusing on a sermon or some other printed mediation of preaching trade might deliver. But the actual schema of divine transmission is slightly more complicated. The priest is placed purely in a transitory position whose "just discourse" makes God's presence apparent by acknowledging the Word's material manifestations. There is a strange tension here between the scope of God's physical expression and a desire to set God apart from the physical world. Dyer begins several of his lines with the verb while irregularly placing the direct object throughout the second part of each line. This pattern is initially broken by recognition of priestly mediation in the line "And when the priest displays" (2.616). Here Dyer's stretches his previous formula to multiple lines, moving his object to the beginning of the next line. This allows Dyer to emphasize the monosyllabic "Him" while to inextricably linking "the all-wise Creator" with his earthly mediation via declaration. This linkage is further strengthened through Dyer's enjambment when the Creator "declares / His presence, pow'r and goodness, confin'd," (2.617-8). Deity, word, and works all seem to slide together seamlessly, but the agency of the declaration is somewhat ambiguous. If the "priest displays" then he too must, as

far as the grammar of the line is concerned, also "declare." Despite his "pow'r and goodness" God remains in the object position through the whole course of his mention. God is certainly speaking through trade, but, in his description, Dyer gives priority to the physical realities of divine mediation and the priest's lips which are filled with argument.

Dyer's attempts to bind theology with commercial processes result in an extension of the project of Natural Theology that projects its assumptions onto a global marketplace. This leap is hardly unique to Dyer who is here participating in the larger discourse of Anglicanism and its relationship to imperialism in eighteenth century. Rowan Strong, in his book, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, describes this commercial theology in detail: "The relation between God, the English, and their empire was envisaged as analogous to the commerce that these Anglicans recognized was at the heart of English expansion" (Strong 109). Dyer's own focus on the domestic product and the operations of trade provide us with a convenient marker, freighted with mythology, religious symbolism (we are, after all, talking about a lamb), and commercial exchange. Ralph Williams, his biographer, notes that Dyer's own philosophical and religious thought relied heavily on William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722) which was republished many times during Dyer's life.[10] In his journals Dyer paraphrased Wollaston several times and seemed impressed by Wollaston's argument. These paraphrases highlight a particular line of natural theology which emphasizes, as Dyer loosely quotes from Wollaston, how a "man who endeavors in the conduct of his life to

[10] Dyer seems to have been most influenced by the sixth edition published in 1738 (Williams 111).

observe the laws of reason…doth already taste something spiritual and above this world" (Williams 111). Natural Theology provides a bridge for those who "observe the laws of reason" to experience something beyond this world by examining the world itself. These religious beliefs were commonly associated with latitudinarians and Dyer could certainly be counted among their number.

This theological assumption that examining the world is always good often usurps Dyer's didactic charge by miring him in gratuitous description. In the second book, Dyer's poetic speaker travels the land to learn from the shepherds themselves: "For this [nature's bounty], I wake the weary hours of rest; With this desire, the merchant I attend; / By this impell'd the shepherd's hut I seek, / And, as he tends his flock, his lectures hear / Attentive, pleas'd with pure simplicity, / And rules divulg'd beneficent to sheep" (Dyer 2.505-510). Like specific catechisms from that "all-wise" deity, here Dyer again hears "lectures" but fails to record them. This knowledge spurs the poetic speaker to get up early in the morning, and travel restlessly and "turn the compass o'ver the painted chart, / To mark the ways of traffic" (2.511-12). Even when Dyer moves this metaphor to specific moments he seems unable to convey any practical knowledge. While providing an all-too-cheery read of the story of Saint Blasius, Dyer writes, "The rev'rend Blasius wore his leisure hours, / And slumber, broken oft: till, fill'd at lengh / With inspiration, after various thought…and o'er Vulcanian stoves, / With tepid lees of oil, and spiky comb, Shew'd how the fleece might stretch to greater length, / and cast a glossier

whiteness" (2.527-34).[11] Blasius's dreams, like the details of the knowledge they inspired can find no representation in Dyer's poem. Yet the poem hurls forward in didactic bliss. Dyer urges the reader on with the imperative mood, ordering us to "seek the bright'ning lock" or "with curious eye observe" (2.560) (2.572).

In this sense Dyer's failure to explain individual processes themselves is indicative of his spiritual passion. And here we arrive at the principal distinction between Dyer's mediatory successes and his failures. With the tapestries at Blenheim, the intoxication of national glory and heroics is broken by the obscuring "shade" which shocks him back into both the present moment and his present project by recognizing the mimetic division between the tapestry and the actual battlefield. There the landscape of his poem anchored Dyer, but it does not tether him for long. The consequences of natural theology and Dyer's latitudinarian belief work against any neutral, natural space where Dyer can provide his poetic speaker with footing. Dyer's poetic imagination throws him into a proselytizing fervor that seems unable to sort through the didactic peculiarities and responsibilities of his georgic. Fortunately, though his stylistic flights-of-fancy and wandering eye may separate Dyer from his flock of sheep, the sheep are able to take care of themselves. In the first book, Dyer imagines some threat to Britain's precious commercial resource. Instead of being rescued by a popular defense of the resource, Dyer's sheep defend themselves: "And fury irresistible, they [the rams] dash / Their hardy frontlets; the wide vale resounds / The flock amaz'd stands safe afar; and oft / Each

[11] Saint Blaise is considered the patron saint of woolworkers. After being arrested for curing throats ailments, he was tortured with iron combs normally used to card wool (Barrely 38).

to the other's might a victim falls: / As fell of old, before that engine's sway, / Which hence ambition imitative wrought, / The beauteous tow'rs of Salem to the dust" (Dyer 1.339-46). The fury of the sheep, like Dyer's own attraction towards their industry, is "irresistible." Yet, for all its pull, the clash is not seen directly, only obliquely through the vale's auditory ringing. The landscape, in this instance, physically transmits the conflict. Perhaps for this reason does not have access to a obscuring "shade" which might shake him free of this fantasy. There is no end in sight, and the victim's fall does not promise any end to either the conflict or the elliptical mediation. These malefic events are like those of "old" and like those yet to come, and the fall of Jerusalem's "beauteous tow'rs" invoking the prophetic language of the Book of Revelations.[12] We are perhaps as distant from his commercial optimism as Dyer will ever stray. But in this dark corner one stumbles into piles of concordant images which resonate across another 18th georgic, William Cowper's *The Task.*

[12]The fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. is often understood to be a source image for much of the apocalyptic imagery of the New Testament, especially in the later Gospels and the Book of Revelation. There is some debate around the dating of Revelation though it is traditionally ascribed to 95 C.E. [Source]

II

Written during the hazy, unsettling dawn of American sovereignty and published in 1785, Cowper's *The Task* is, in many ways, a kind of response to Dyer's commercial and evangelical optimism. Like Dyer, Cowper was invested in pastoral efforts (though in a lay capacity). Accordingly, Cowper's georgic teems with theological implications which both refute and build on the implications that can be found in Dyer's poem—perhaps even offering deliverance from the kinds of ruin which Dyer alludes to in his Homeric battle scene. Though his poem is also filled with commercial processes, Cowper reverses Dyer's teleology and unpacks the finished product in order to tracing its material origin. Cowper's sofa, which Cowper quickly breaks down into its natural components, displaces Dyer's finished frock as an index for modernity. Likewise, Great Britain, instead of producing and projecting power along the lines of Dyer's imperial imagery, has instead pulled inward where the corpulent city swells. Indeed, Cowper's diligent deconstruction of the sofa might be read as a kind of remedy to a city like London, which for Cowper seems, "So rich, so throng'd, so drain'd, and so supplied / As London, opulent, enlarged, and still / Increasing London? Babylon of old / Not more the glory of the earth, than she / A more accomplish'd word's chief glory now" (Cowper I.720-24). The comparison of London to Babylon, if apt, hardly flatters the city where Cowper spent his fondly remembered past "[w]ith frequent intercourse, and always sweet, And always friendly, we were wont to cheat / A tedious hour—" (Cowper "An

Epistle to Joseph Hill, Esq."). And yet, despite those memories, Cowper uses his georgic to interrogate city and rake alike.

Like Dyer's poem, *The Task* uses the georgic mode to sort through a wide landscape of media objects. However Cowper seems to be adopting a looser understanding of the georgic to these ends. At one point, Goodman, in trying to construe this quality, terms Cowper's poetry "georgic-inflected" (Goodman 71). This looser relationship with the georgic helps Cowper work through some of the irony necessarily generated by a writer with a penchant for leisure operating in a genre that emphasizes work. Indeed, most of the detailed, teacherly descriptions in Cowper's georgic seem concerned more with perambulating the countryside than with cultivating it. In *Cowper's 'Task': Structure and Influence*, Martin Priestman remarks on this apparent contradiction. Priestman emphasizes the importance of James Thomson's *The Seasons* in expanding the georgic to include the "work" of the retired spectator. He writes: "*The Seasons* is a major source for [Cowper's] first book, not only in its set-piece landscape descriptions but also in its central declaration of a universal work principle: 'By ceaseless action all that is subsists'" (Priestman 8). So, regardless of Cowper's position outside of physical labor, his poem still affirms work's worth. Within the action of Cowper's poem this "universal work principle" may be fruitfully broken into two strands: agricultural and poetic. The latter is of particular importance for Cowper who recognizes the importance of poetic creation as labor. *The Task*'s conceit, to quote Cowper's own advertisement at the head of his poem, to write a poem with a "Sofa for a subject" was meant to provide distraction

from Cowper's mental illness. With this in mind, those same diversionary walks, a staple of the gentleman observer, allow Cowper to "labor" by representing experience through his verses.

Nevertheless, Cowper does at certain points engage with the minutia of agricultural work. And like Dyer, Cowper when he examines labor, produces an awareness of the imperial project as well its evangelical implications. He highlights, for example, how one might produce a hot-bed for exotic gardening with "stercorarious heap / Impregnated with quick fermenting salts, / And potent to resist the freezing blast" (3.464-65). Though Cowper here seems at perhaps at his most intimate with both the English countryside and English agricultural practices, the labors he catalogs here conflate the qualities of cosmopolitan corruption and rustic purity he had previously presented in a more polarized way, for the work practiced at his isolated greenhouse in Olney is inextricable from the imperial project. Beth Fowkes Tobin, in her 2005 book, *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760-1820* notes that "[t]he exotic plants, which appear in Cowper's greenhouse, arrive there, not by magic, but as the products of dislocating dynamics, which…presented exotic plants to the English imagination as discrete commodities, shorn of cultural and ecological ties" (Tobin 170). Tobin highlights how the specialized nature of exotic plant cultivation stresses an elevated class and gender position embedded in Cowper's poetic speaker/gardener which contrasts to the rude "lubbbard labour" of the country farmer. But this reading does not take into account the strange descriptions of English winter which the exotic plant

endures. For the exotic plant, England becomes "a clime so rude" that compels the gardener who, having been "timely warn'd, himself supplies / Her want of care, screening and keeping warm / The plenteous bloom, that no rough blast may sweep / His garlands from the boughs" (Cowper 3.436-42). Cowper's cultivation of fragile life against inclement circumstances brings to mind the archetypical missionary struggling at the periphery to cultivate spiritual life.[13] Both "rude" and "rough" have clear analogues on the spectrum of civilization and cowper, like a missionary or colonizer, must be mindful of his "supplies." The scene also recalls Cowper's own description of beleaguered spiritual growth from the *Olney Hymns* which he co-wrote with John Newton. In his hymn "Winter" Cowper writes, "Dear Lord, regard my feeble cry, / I faint and droop till thou appear; / Wilt thou permit thy plant to die? / Must it be winter all the year?" (Newton and Cowper, "Winter").

However, despite its evangelical ends, this imperial exercise does not lead Cowper to a wholesale praise of its produce. Cowper continues:

> To raise the prickly and green-coated gourd
> So grateful to the palate, and when rare
> So coveted, else base and disesteem'd—
> Food for the vulgar merely—is an art
> That toiling ages have but just matured,
> And at this moment unassay'd in song.
> Ye gnats have had, and frogs and mice long since
> Their eulogy; those sang the Mantuan bard,
> And in thy numbers, Phillips, shines for ay
> The solitary shilling. Pardon then
> Ye sage dispensers of poetic fame! (3.447-57).

[13] In another move straight from the imperialist's handbook, the plant is gendered, here with the feminine singular pronoun "she."

Rather than adopt Virgil's, Phillip's, or Dyer's, unswervingly grandiloquent understanding of nature's produce Cowper takes a gentler tack, emphasizing the relative quality of the gourd's value. At the same time, he elevates the process of agriculture to an "art" which "[t]oiling ages have just matured" (3.451). Cowper extends this relativism to include general poetic fame, implicating even Virgil in a system where any "rare" object can be made valuable.

Such opinions extend to Cowper's feelings towards sermons and his anxieties about his own pastoral footing, eventually leading him to emphasize his own favored kind of natural theology. At the beginning of his third book Cowper contextualizes his poem's poetic speaker: "Since pulpits fail, and sounding-boards reflect / Most part an empty ineffectual sound, / What chance that I, to fame so little known, / Nor conversant with men or manners much, Should speak to purpose" (3.21-25). Though his poetic speaker's platform must instead take root in the land because he is not "conversant," Cowper does not limit this inability to himself. He speaks broadly, noting the failures of "pulpits" as a successful mode of communication. Rather than characterizing them as mute he grants the pulpits sound which is "empty and ineffectual." Essentially Cowper is describing a noise that is unable to generate a reasoned resonance or evangelical action in its listeners. Extending the metaphor, one might suppose that the church's "sounding-boards" reflect sounds both empty and full—proving an unreliable qualitative filter. Nature seems to promise a refuge from these empty speeches, and the focus of Cowper's

speaker moves to its safe landscape which "has peace, and much secures the mind / From all assaults of evil" (3.679-80).

This conceit places Cowper's theology in a position quite similar to that occupied by Dyer's latitudinarianism. Only, instead of fixating on divine processes so sublime they defy mediation, Cowper begins to render his landscapes in a more allegorical register in his next book, "The Winter Evening." In contrast to the sometimes pedantic, physical descriptions in his fourth book, in "The Winter Evening" Cowper receives a daily newspaper about which he muses, "What is it but a map of busy life / Its fluctuations and its vast concerns?" (Cowper 4. 55-6). Rather than pass over this provocative image, Cowper's framing narrative landscape balloons to encompass the new media. He continues, "Here runs the mountainous and craggy ridge / That tempts ambition. On the summit, see, / The seals of office, glitter in his eyes; He climbs, he pants, he grasps them. / At his heels, Close at his heels a demagogue ascends" (4.57-61). In this fleeting moment one begins to understand the power of landscape as media. The fact of this landscape's highly metaphorical nature is critical. Cowper has provided the reader with a landscape within the landscape of his larger narrative. But what exactly is this landscape representing? To be sure, there is a sense of dread as the demagogue gains on Cowper's poetic speaker, but the affective description of the act of reading a newspaper may only be the start. Cowper seems to be communicating two additional things outside of the realm of feeling. First, that the newspaper in particular and media in general, are places of contact with the public debate. Though Cowper had been waiting

for news and the "messenger of grief, / Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some," his interest seems to focus on the debate around that grief, rather than the grief itself (4.13-14). Concerning India, Cowper wonders, "Is India free? And does she wear her plumed / And jeweled turban with a smile of peace, / Or do we grind her still?" Here the issues of historic fact take a marginal status compared to the state of, in Cowper's words, "The popular harangue, the tart reply, / The logic and the wisdom of the wit" (4.31-32). The contest of ideas has been directly superimposed onto the metaphorical landscape which engulfs Cowper's poetic speaker.

This brings us landscape's status as mediating force. Unlike Dyer's transfixion with the Blenheim tapestries, Cowper's mediation on his local landscape does not pull him away from auxiliary media, but instead imposes itself upon that media. The world of Cowper's imagined newspaper is distinctly imperial in its imposition of a symbolic means which usurps and occupies Cowper's frame narrative. But here even this imposition cannot shake free from the landscape as a mode of mediation, and Cowper's newly imagined newspaper-landscape shutters with the rise of metaphorical and rhetorical barriers. Interestingly, though the landscape provides space for discussion, the actual participant's speech is muted. The demagogue, after casting down his adversary has his polemic converted into "rills of oily eloquence in soft / Meanders lubricate the course they take;" (4.64-65). Speech here has been transformed into a stream or "rill," a popular trope in scenery. Here discussion becomes an act of landscaping. But curiously

the content of the speaker's discussion has been abstracted, swallowed within Cowper's landscape.

The scene just parsed does not appear to bode well for any understanding of the eighteenth century georgic which suggests these loaded landscapes might provide provocative, specific theological discussion. The intellectual speaker in Cowper's episode with the newspaper seems thoroughly caricatured as beyond any point of understanding. Great polemics have been reduced to empty noise or colorful speech without translation. But not everyone in Cowper's *Task* spouts vocal "rills." Cowper's cardstock intellectuals and demagogues are tangential to his principal argument. In the second book, "The Timepiece," Cowper begins a strikingly long and harsh indictment of his generation. Beginning simply enough, he address "My very gentle reader, yet unborn" and remarks that "Since Heav'n would sure grow weary of a world / Productive only of a race like ours" (2.581-84): a race that, in one of Cowper's more succinct images, "Waste[s] youth in occupations only fit / For second childhood, and devote old age / To sports which only childhood could excuse" (2.636-7). Cowper's scathing critique in this section has been occasioned by his first direct reference to the loss of the American colonies, figured as a "jewel out of England's crown" (2.265).

In order to understand this particular leap, as it couples the loss of empire with the apocalyptic descriptions that follow, one must understand the stakes of the British Empire's evangelical role, which, in the commercial theology of the Anglican Church,

make commercial success contingent upon missionary work at home and abroad.[14] Accordingly, Cowper's religious turn towards the end of his book is a deeply rational, rather than emotional or even spiritual, action. In his turn, the notion of mediation emerges again as Cowper writes that "Paul should himself direct me. I would trace / His master-strokes, and draw from his design" (2.397-98). The renewal of this relationship grants Cowper, and his ideal England, the ability to return to the fold. This point of harmony also marks a departure from Dyer. Trade, as a trope that spans across the landscapes of both Dyer and Cowper, works as a barometer of godliness. What's most revolutionary about Cowper's poem, along this particular line, is that his Christian empire is not contingent on trade, but instead turns inward, towards the teachings of Paul and, by extension, the text itself, without concern for the bustling, boisterous landscape around him.

[14]Again, for more information on this connection see Rowan Strong's *Anglicanism and the British Empire*.

III

In his landmark study of Wordsworth, Geoffrey Hartman identifies two principal types of experience in Wordsworth's *The Prelude.* The first, *akedah*, ties and joins—one might even say offers communion—while the second, *apocalypse*, encompasses a contrasting but not necessarily contradictory violence against natural order. For Hartman, *The Prelude* "displaces or interprets apocalypse as akedah" (225). In other words, moments of violence also provide a union born of that violence.[15] Hartman locates this violence in Wordsworth within the trauma of the French Revolutionary Wars and the imperial ambitions of Napoleon's empire. Despite the georgic's nominal distance from brutality and war, anxieties of the present creep into its representations of those events. The thunder of distant naval engagements can just be heard in the georgic's bucolic spaces. In some respect this historic present-ness gives the georgic form its immediacy and relevance. Georgics are answers to moments of strife. Both Cowper's and Dyer's poems, despite their intermittently pedagogical timbre, work through conflict to locate objects of philosophical purpose. Dyer finds this truth buried in the material objects and transmits his findings in the ecstatic (if elliptical) description of that commerce. This focus locks Dyer into a feedback loop which demonstrates the double-bind of the georgic's mimetic scope: imperial, evangelical landscapes cannot accomplish direct transmission or conversion. Though they might offer communion and threaten

[15] Hartman, in justifying his term "akedah," mentions that "In Jewish religious thinking *akedah* always refers primarily to the sacrifice (viz. binding) of Isaac.

apocalyptic ruin, georgic landscapes such as he offers anchors the material voices embedded in their folds.

For Cowper the matter is more complicated. Cowper's interpretation of biblical truth and its relationship to the earth present more difficulties to the process of poetic mediation. The material world and its media are bankrupt of legitimacy and Dyer's romance with mimetic power is nowhere to be found. In a certain sense the land is unimportant for Cowper. God channels all meaning through the Word whose details remain just off-stage. Still, the land does provide Cowper with an access point for transcendence. Cowper writes, at the conclusion of his poem, that while he played awhile gathering flowers to adorn the sofa, but eventually he "[l]et fall th' unfinish'd wreath, and roved for fruit. / Roved far and gather'd much" (4.262). The land provides both idle flowers and substantial fruit. Cowper's play between the evanescent and substantive is far from a straightforward dichotomy. For one, idleness provides, in Cowper's imagination, a "Paradise that has survived the fall" (3.42). The fruit further unfolds into both *akedah* and *apocalypse*. The sustenance it provides joins man to the land in dependency, but the fruit also invokes independence as it brings to mind the violence of the biblical fall from grace. This brings us back to Cowper's own emphasis on a kind of "work" that, even without direction, somehow sustains the universe. The georgic is a poetic space well suited for this kind of work. Only in Cowper's case, rather than vegetation, the landscape's crowding media become the mass of matter being

"worked." Each condemnation of his material existence allows Cowper to cut and turn the earth, preparing it to be sown by other hands.

For Cowper, Paul's writing provides a means of perfect transmission that can distill and sow biblical truth. Cowper does not attempt to burden his georgic with that truth's reproduction. Instead, his poetic task, assigned to him in the hope that he might stave off his own madness, is to investigate the processes of perfect mimesis from a distance which treats secular and sacred attempts with equal scrutiny. Curiously, despite his georgic's suspicion of mediation, Cowper greatly admired Matthew Prior's "Charity: A Paraphrase on the Thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians."[16] Prior's poem does something that Cowper never attempts in his much more encyclopedic poem: it directly represents Paul's message. In it Paul's words are adorned with poetic devises and laid before the reader—but these words do not carry the imperial force of Paul's text. In the original epistle Paul gives the reader the basic evangelical qualifications: that though one might demonstrate the "gift of prophecy [and his understanding] of all mysteries and knowledge," without Charity he is "nothing." One might read First Corinthians 13 as a call for evangelical integrity as well as imperial value, but Prior's paraphrase does not wholly embrace this task. Instead, in Prior's poem, Charity becomes implicated in the mediation of truth. It is charity whose absence turns "eloquence" to "noise" and, when present, "[s]oftens the high, and rears the abject mind" (Prior

[16]More on Cowper's respect for Proir can be found in several letters, including: "To the Rev. William Unwin." 3 August, 1782. and "To the Rev. William Unwin." 5 January, 1782. Additionally James Sambrook, in his introduction to *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, concludes that Cowper's later poem "Charity" may have been prompted by the Prior's earlier poem.

"Charity" 16-18). Rather than focus on the integrity of the speaker, as Paul does, Prior emphasizes the palatability of the speech produced. While Paul presents the possibility of truly communicative evangelism through Charity, Prior is suspicious. Reason and art, even "by Faith directed, and confirm'd by hope" have discrete limits and "Heaven's fuller influence mocks our dazzled sight; / Too great its swiftness, and too strong its light" (44) (47-48). Dismissing the possibility of any true sensible path, Prior inverts Paul's criteria for *akedah* into *apocalypse* and directs the reader to a time without such mediation: "But soon the mediate clouds shall be dispell'd; / The sun shall soon be face to face beheld" (49-50). Or, in a similar sentiment rendered in "Paul's Voyage" from the *Olney Hymns*, Cowper and Newton write, "Yet since thy word is past, / We'll venture through a thousand storms / To see thy face at last" (Newton and Cowper, "Paul's Voyage").

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